

Lewisham College embraces panto season



They're not behind you, they're in campus round-up on pages 10 and 11

Picture by Nick Linford

Monday 12 December 2011

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Learner Support



FE Week talks to the Head of Learner Support at Lewisham College

Page 5

Christmas break



FE Week's agitator says "bah humbug" to holiday closures

Page 7

Festive round-up



Colleges get into the spirit of Christmas in this week's round-up

Pages 10 & 11

Careers advice



High quality careers advice debated at AoC conference

Pages 12 & 13

Crimbo-mascot



Mini-mascot gets festive and bites off more than he can chew

Page 16

UCU in financial turmoil

FE Week Exclusive

Ian Nash

@IanNasher

Urgent action is needed to prevent the University and College Union (UCU) being plunged into debt, a letter from a UCU Trustee to all the National Executive Committee members reveals.

The letter, seen by FE Week, describes "a staggering loss to the union, something in the region of £3m - £4m" after the UCU Congress was "misled" into believing the sale of one of its buildings would raise enough to pay off debts.

However, the UCU insists it is "unwise" to gauge what the financial situation is with the union, until the sale, which is ongoing, has been completed.

Britannia House, in North London, was proposed for sale at an estimated price of £12 million after the merger of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT) to form the UCU in June 2006.

However, in the letter, Fawzi Ibrahim, the former NATFHE national treasurer and now UCU Trustee, says: "I'm taking this unusual step of

writing to you regarding an important aspect of the union's finances.

"Congress 2011 was told that 'the money received from the sale of Britannia Street property will be sufficient to pay off the existing debts. There will be some left over to add to the capital replenishment fund'.

"This is incorrect. Congress was misled."

Mr Ibrahim says that following Congress, he wrote to the General Secretary, Sally Hunt, asking for clarification, leading to an exchange of ten emails.

In none, Mr Ibrahim's letter added, did she approach the subject "let alone answer my questions" so he went to the union's auditors.

The letter continues: "According to the auditors, at the time when the audit was carried out, the union owes a total of £12.45m in loans.

"The estimated cost of the sale of Britannia St. property (including agent's commission, consultants and legal fees) is £2.03m.

"It follows that, if Britannia St. was sold at the agreed price of £12m, far from that being 'sufficient money to pay off the existing debts', there will be a huge shortfall."

When approached, Mr Ibrahim refused to comment on the leak but he

did say: "UCU's finances are fundamentally sound.

"All we need is a long-term plan to pay back the existing debts over say the next ten or so years regardless of Britannia St."

When pressed on the fact he had been openly critical of the union's dealings in the past, he said: "It is no secret that I have, over the past few years, expressed my concern at the attitude towards the union's finances which borders on complacency."

One UCU source went further, saying the attitude had been that once the Britannia Street building is sold, "all our problems will be over".

The result was a fragile financial situation, leaving the UCU at the mercy of the banks. His further concern was that any change in bank rates could see interest payments rocket and services would inevitably be affected.

These concerns are echoed in the rest of Mr Ibrahim's letter, despite his assurances.

In November 2009, contracts were exchanged on the sale of the former NATFHE HQ in Britannia Street after the UCU bought a central London building in Carlow Street and a bridging loan to cover costs while the sale was completed.

The following year the UCU paid £145,862 in interest on the loan, which carried liabilities of £12.3 million.

The letter continues: "If you add the £2.27m advanced in cash when Carlow St. was purchased and a bridging loan was obtained, the outcome of the decision to buy Carlow Street, a decision that was taken in haste without a meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee, is a staggering loss to the union, something in the region of £3m - £4m.

"Such an outcome was not hard to foresee at the time when property prices were beginning to decline. This is why, when it came to the Trustees, the decision to go ahead with the purchase was not unanimous.

"As a National Executive member you are charged with looking after the union finances and take decision on how the union's money is spent.

"You cannot do that without the full knowledge of the true state of these finances. I hope this letter has helped to do that."

A UCU spokesperson said: "The impact of recession on the property market is well-documented.

"It would be unwise to try to gauge what the financial situation with Britannia Street is until a sale has been completed."

inside...



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Three per cent drop for colleges, survey reveals

Nick Reinis
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Colleges have suffered an overall drop of three per cent in 16-18 year old learners, a new survey has revealed.

The survey, conducted by Lsect, funding consultancy and the publisher of *FE Week*, also showed that more than 60 per cent of further education (FE) and sixth form colleges, are concerned that learners will not return after Christmas.

The statistics, from 88 who responded, are similar to those from a previous Lsect survey, compiled in September.

It is also similar to the recruitment survey conducted by the Association of Colleges (AoC), released in October, which showed that 49 per cent of 182 colleges reported falling numbers of 16-19-year-olds, compared to last year. However, it showed a national drop of only 0.1 per cent.

These up-to-date figures, collected as colleges submitted R04 data returns last week, show a target total of 182,914 - but an actual recruitment of 177,228 learners, meaning a three per cent loss overall.

Sixth form colleges performed slightly better than FE colleges, with a performance decrease of one per cent, compared to four per cent. However, the sample of FE colleges was much larger, with 68 responders and 20 for sixth form colleges.

The survey also revealed 64 per cent of those who replied are either "a little concerned" or have "very big concerns" that 16-18 year-old learners may fail to return to their colleges after Christmas.

A number of reasons have been blamed for the decline in learner numbers, including the loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance.

However, the survey also threw up a different line to the exclusive 'employer poaching' story in *FE Week* last week.

Jon Carr, assistant principal funding and planning at Tameside College, said four learners had been poached by a "private training organisation" after enrolling.

He said: "Somehow they got hold of the details for a learner, persuaded that person to join on their course and three others have gone as well. It was after the first six weeks so it acts negatively towards our success rates. We don't know if anything was offered, but somehow they managed to persuade the learner and then they may have spoken to the other three."

He added: "Success rates are the main currency in our performance and how it's measured. We were clearly very angry."

The college is yet to report the incident to the AoC, nor to the Skills Funding Agency, but they have spoken to their local authority for guidance.

Teresa Frith, policy manager for the AoC, said: "It's another example of poor practice that would not appear to be in the interest of learners in the long term."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) added: "This is a practice that AELP would discourage."

A spokesperson for the Skills Funding Agency said: "The Agency hasn't been made aware of any individual cases of learner poaching."

"Should a case be brought to the attention of the Agency by a learner, we will review accordingly."

The survey also revealed that 42 per cent of the colleges who responded say they suffered some difficulties when they submitted their R04 data return.

College finance concerns

Nick Reinis
@fenickr

A survey has revealed a high proportion of senior leaders are concerned about their college finances.

Conducted by Capita's further and higher education business last month, it found 87 per cent of 36 principals and vice-principals questioned are concerned about short to medium-term financial viability.

It was undertaken for the launch of their white paper, *The Vice Principal's Guide to Efficiency: How Technology Can Help Cut Costs for FE Colleges*, which reveals where up to £2 million of savings can be made in further education (FE) colleges.

The survey revealed that colleges already recognise that savings can be made by making better use of staff and facilities, with more than half (52 per cent) believing this has the greatest potential for reducing costs in their organisation.

This was followed by administrative processes (23 per cent) and new business models (16 per cent) such as mergers and shared services. In fact, 61 per cent of those questioned were already actively investigating the possibility of shared services.

George Layfield, UK sales manager, said: "Each student drop-out can represent between £5,000 and £10,000 of lost funding and recruitment costs yet, despite this, some rates remain as high as 20 per cent."

John O'Callaghan, assistant director of information services at Hackney Community College, added: "There can be practical hurdles to overcome for leadership teams to make the most of data collected on the management of their college and it can be a challenge to foster a positive culture of data ownership."

"However, it's worth persevering as data provides the only way to get a true picture of how efficiently your college is running and if improvements can be made."

For more on this story, see the *FE Week* website, www.feweek.co.uk

FE Week clarifies...

FE Week receives many questions about government announcements. This week we sought a number of clarifications from BIS on your behalf.

No change in rates

The national funding rates will not change in 2012/13, according to BIS.

The investment strategy 'New Challenges, New Chances' makes no reference to funding rates, but a BIS spokesperson has confirmed "they have stayed the same".

The BIS spokesperson also confirmed that the large employer discount will remain at 25 per cent.

The apprenticeship rate for learners aged 25 and above will also remain at 20 per cent less than the rate for 19 to 24 year-olds.

Colleges dissolving

Colleges can now dissolve themselves as part of new freedoms given to the FE sector by government.

BIS has told *FE Week* that this is "a new power for colleges" and that "colleges may decide that they wish to adopt an alternative organisational form and/or form new partnerships with other providers to meet the needs of learners, employers and their broader communities. Such proposals could lead to dissolution of the current corporation." Permission from the Secretary of State would no longer be required.

Bursary details soon

New details about the bursary scheme for FE teachers and trainers undertaking ITT will be announced next Spring, the government has announced.

John Hayes MP unveiled the new bursaries at the Association of Colleges (AoC) Annual Conference, and said it would ensure FE teachers are "the best in the world".

A BIS spokesperson told *FE Week*: "Arrangements for future bursaries are being discussed with the sector first."

"We anticipate further details in spring 2012."

What's in a name?

The government is conducting a review into how they can protect the "terminology and titles" of FE colleges.

A BIS spokesperson told *FE Week* that "colleges need to apply to the Department for approval for the name of a college corporation against published criteria" and that the government is not against a college rebranding themselves without the word 'college' in its name.

SASE left unchanged

Functional skills at Level 1 will continue to be the minimum standard for completing an intermediate (level 2) apprenticeship, according to the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP).

AELP says the Joint Apprenticeship Unit at BIS/DfE has clarified that the current Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) Guidance requirements will continue to apply.



Progression funding to be piloted in 2012

Nick Summers

@SummersNicholas

The funding of basic numeracy and literacy is to be completely overhauled following little improvement in adult basic skills during the last decade.

The government will pilot a new funding scheme next year which allocates provision based on the 'distance' a learner has 'travelled' on a programme, rather than the end qualification.

The pilot, announced in the 'New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan', will incentivise providers to deliver better skills gains for learners on basic skills courses.

The report states: "Building on Lord Boswell's report on adult literacy we have undertaken a major review of how provision is delivered to improve the economic and personal returns to this investment."

The pilot will be introduced despite the Skills Funding Agency's (SFA) existing plans for a new, simplified funding system for adult skills, which will be 'dual running' next year and fully implemented in 2013/14.

It report adds: "Despite considerable efforts over the last 10 years to improve the basic skills of adults, our new national survey shows that 24 per cent of adults (8.1 million people) lack functional numeracy skills and 15 per cent (5.1

million people) lack functional literacy skills.

"This is unacceptable."

The new funding pilot is one of 15 recommendations set out in the 'Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills', published by BIS but produced by John Vorhaus, Jennifer Litster, Michael Frearson and Stuart Johnson.

The review states: "Inspections and programme evaluations should include attempts to assess whether and how far learners retain skills over time, and how far qualifications are geared towards promoting underpinning literacy and numeracy skills.

"It should be a priority to gather longitudinal evidence on skills retention and loss over time."

The new funding scheme is a response, in part, to the 2011 Skills for Life Survey, published by BIS, which shows a decrease in the number of adults acquiring basic maths.

Toni Fazaeli, the Chief Executive of the Institute for Learning (IFL), said: "We agree strongly

with the government's focus on numeracy and literacy and its proposals to ensure that proficiency in maths and English is embedded throughout the FE and skills system."

The 2011 Skills for Life Survey found that 24 per cent of respondents failed to achieve an entry level 3 or above in numeracy - a three per cent increase in the last eight years.

Joy Mercer, the Director of Education Policy at the Association of Colleges (AoC), said: "One of the problems with the qualifications for adults literacy and numeracy is that they didn't produce people that could actually enter the workplace with functional literacy and numeracy skills.

"You therefore get teaching to the test, because colleges are measured very definitely on the attainment of qualifications, rather than here's individual A, what do they really need to become functionally literate."

The survey also found an increase of 13 per cent in the number of people achieving a level 2 or above in literacy, with "no significant change" in respondents achieving at least a level 1.

Carol Taylor, Director for Research and Development at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), says there are

too many adults with "very poor basic skills" learning in a system which "isn't working for them."

She said: "It's alarming that 15 per cent of the adult population are performing at entry level 3 or below in literacy and 24 per cent in numeracy at entry level 2 or below.

"Put simply, around one in six of the adult population has difficulty with aspects of reading and writing, which means they are seriously disadvantaged as employees, citizens and parents."

NIACE has recommended that BIS improve the quality of teaching by working more closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as local authorities, further education colleges and training providers.

"The Treasury has quite rightly shown an interest in the impact of the Government spend and the fact that, despite an enormous and welcome investment in skills for life over the past decade, there are simply far too many people who have not been helped," Taylor said.

"NIACE suggests that making learner qualifications the all important target for providers means teachers have been encouraged to teach to the test, thereby 'plucking only the low hanging fruit'.

Ms Fazaeli added: "We are concerned that too few literacy and numeracy teachers have the specialist subject teaching qualifications they need, and this is borne out by Ofsted's observation that literacy teaching is better when teachers are properly qualified in the subject."



Cash incentive places doubled

Nick Reinis

@fenickr

Fresh details have been revealed on the awarding of 40,000 cash incentives to smaller businesses to take on apprentices.

Business Secretary Vince Cable announced on November 16 that 20,000 incentive places of £1,500 would be provided to companies with less than 50 employees.

It would be handed to employers who had not engaged in the programme, but were keen to take on a 16 to 24 year old apprentice.

The initial number was then doubled little more than a week later - on November 25 - when Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced that up to 40,000 incentive places would be offered as part of the £1 billion of funding through the Youth Contract.

However, no further details were released on the mechanism of the payments or when they would be made available for during the 2012/13 financial year.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), though, has said it expects more details to be announced "soon" by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), with a criteria currently being put together.

A spokesperson for BIS said: "Vince Cable announced on November 16 that 20,000 incentive places would be provided for small businesses, not previously engaged in the programme, to offer apprenticeship places for 16-24 year olds.

"As part of the £1 billion of funding provided

through the Youth Contract to help young people, it was announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on November 25 that additional funding would be made available to increase the number of incentive places to up to 40,000.

"The incentive scheme will continue to be targeted at small businesses. The NAS are currently developing the precise eligibility criteria.

"The NAS will provide full details on their website shortly."

However, BIS has also revealed the payments will be balanced against completions and the future employment of the apprentice.

The spokesperson added: "Businesses taking part in the scheme will receive two payments for each apprentice they take on.

"The first payment will be made soon after the apprentice has started their framework. The second payment will be timed to incentive completion and ongoing employment."

When Mr Cable announced the cash incentives, he also revealed a host of other measures to make it easier for companies to take on apprentices.

He said processes will be simplified to make it quicker to take on apprentices, including streamlining health and safety requirements, and a focus on targeting the programme where apprenticeships deliver greatest value.

Apprenticeship providers, will also be required to offer training in English and maths to the standard of a good GCSE (level 2) for all apprenticeships.

For more on the plans, businesses can contact the NAS on their hotline for employers, which is 0800 150 600.

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FE Week investigates...

As disputes rise so do the costs

Andrew Maurant
Freelance journalist

As icy draughts and the impact of budget cuts blow through further education, tensions among staff are rising. Small wonder, perhaps that college managers are increasingly looking for outside help.

There's now a growing demand for the services of outside human resources (HR) consultants - some costing £800 a day - to help sort out a variety of conflicts.

There are grumbles aplenty. According to a recent members' survey by the lecturers' union UCU, 84 per cent of respondents admitted to finding their job stressful last year.

Two thirds reported 'unreasonable expectations' from colleagues, students and managers' as a principal cause. Even allowing for those who enjoy a good moan, this sounds like an unhealthy situation.

So outsiders are being hired to help sort out disputes: redundancy; breakdown of staff relationships; rows over unannounced lesson observations; and wrangles over contracts. But

are they value for money - and why employ them when colleges have their own personnel teams?

Sue Clyne, executive director of HR Guildford College has seen things from both sides of the fence - she worked as a freelance herself until earlier this year. "Conflict mediation is a growing area," she says. "Sometimes an internal HR person can be heavily involved; and disputes get to a very emotive level."

One college where an outsider may have helped broker a peace deal is Westminster Kingsway. Lecturers there have boycotted unannounced lesson observations by managers for almost four years. Keen to break the deadlock, principal Andy Wilson hired Martin Rosner head of HR at FE Associates, to help find a compromise.

The practice of managers dropping in on lessons and monitoring lecturers without notice has severely strained relationships at several colleges in London and beyond. One lecturer, who asked not to be named, said: "It's like 'we're going to catch you out - we know you're lazy and cut corners, and we're going to prove it'. I'd say this is probably the most stressful thing for any teacher, and the most common reason people are getting out."

Neither Wilson nor Rosner wished to discuss the current situation at Westminster Kingsway now that dialogue between lecturers' representatives and management is underway. "It wouldn't be proper to talk to the press or undermine things," said Rosner. "It's a sensitive issue."

Rosner says FE Associates get called upon 'as honest brokers' to resolve all sorts of issues. "It can be over anything, such as a complaint of harassment," he says. "There's more of this work now - we're building it up. Things are very difficult for colleges at the moment - the last thing they want is to be involved in a protracted dispute."

He declined to say how much he charges but, according to Clyne, outside HR consultants' fees range from £300 to £800 a day. But, amid recession and in a competitive field, charges 'have come down over the last 12 months from a minimum of £450', she adds.

Clyne's work ranges from resolving conflicts between individuals to delivering training advice. She sees a steady growing demand for HR consultancy, especially to deal with the workload created by re-structuring and redundancy.

But if college management is paying the bill,

can outside HR help be even-handed? "When you're being paid by the college they want you to deliver results," Clyne says. "Although they're likely to accept independent advice, if you say 'I think management have got everything wrong' you won't be popular." Rosner says the aim is for a 'mutually agreed outcome', to sort out disputes but admits that's not always possible.

From the union perspective, outside HR consultants are a mixed blessing - 'a curate's egg' - according to Chris Powell, London regional official for UCU. "Increasingly in the last year or two in London, I've found myself dealing with them," he says. "Some I have a great deal of time and respect for."

"They know their job; they're focused and professional."

"But others I have a less positive view of - I've a number of experiences where, in my view, their intervention was unhelpful and exacerbated the situation. Some end up telling the senior management what to do rather than providing advice and options."

"In some places they seem to become the HR department - they hover around far too long. That baffles me - they don't come cheap. Proper permanent staff should be appointed instead."



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FE Week profile

David Travis ~ his story

Janet Murray

@jan_murray

Head of Learner Support at Lewisham College talks to *FE Week*

At 25, David Travis is certainly one of the youngest college senior managers in the country – not bad for a guy who fell into working with young people almost by chance. As Head of Learner Support at Lewisham College, he is responsible for getting learners into the college and making sure they stick around.

Ironically it was his own difficulties in education that led him down his current career path. A conscientious student, Travis flew through his GCSEs and started A levels in English, psychology, law and history, but found the pace of work much faster and the content “much drier” than GCSE. By the end of his first term in sixth form, he had dropped English and history, leaving a gaping hole in his timetable.

As it was too late to pick up any new subjects, his head of sixth form suggested he get involved in a project helping younger students with literacy and numeracy issues. From the first session, he was hooked.

“I started working with them [the students] at Christmas and one of them sat GCSEs in July,” he recalls. “Being there at the end, and knowing that I had helped to build their confidence and self-esteem and helped to contribute towards them getting a decent grade, was fantastic.”

The experience led him to volunteer with his local Connexions, as part of a youth advisory board. When a paid position came up, as a peer mentor for young people using the service, he was encouraged to apply.

Leaving school at 17 was a tough decision, but having “never really wanted to do A-levels in the first place” (Travis had wanted to study performing arts at college but a careers advisor steered him into A-levels instead) he felt it was the right move.

After spending most of his formative years in the sleepy county of Staffordshire, working in Stoke city centre – where unemployment was high and drugs problems were common – made him realise how sheltered his own life had been.

But what surprised him more, was moving back to work in Staffordshire as a schools-based careers advisor a few years later and finding that these problems – and drugs in particular – could be just as much of a problem in the “sleepy suburbs.”

He recalls working with one thirteen-year-old who was addicted to crack and heroin and ended up being placed in local authority care. Mental health issues were also common, particularly amongst those with complex home lives.

“You can keep them [learners] safe while they are in school or college, but you don’t

know what’s going on outside of the gates or at home,” he says.

What Connexions tried to do was bring together the standard universal careers advice and the intensive work on barriers to education and employment – something Travis always believed “made sense.”

And while he recognises that “careers advice does always seem to get a bad reputation,” having had a bad experience himself, he was determined to make sure “no one ever left unhappy with what they had heard” from him.

At 23, having qualified as a Connexions personal advisor at just 21, Travis was looking for a new challenge. He was keen to move back to London, having spent some of his childhood there, so when a Connexions job came up in Kensington, supporting people with learning disabilities, he decided to go for it.

Having discovered that there was no college course in the area for people with severe learning disabilities, he set about creating one, working alongside the local authority, college and social workers and the education funding body the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA). It was an experience that stood him in good stead when he decided to apply for his current role at Lewisham College.

He admits that when he applied, at the age of 24, he thought he wouldn’t stand a chance of getting it. “I was really nervous being at the interview because people there already knew each other and were talking about people that they knew together and that they all had a history of line managing,” he recalls. “I have to say, being a twentysomething, it looked like a toughie.”

“Housing is another key issue for students and something Travis says he is not expecting to get any better over the Christmas period”

Fresh in his mind was a speech given by a senior person at Connexions, who had said that young people in their early twenties were not “emotionally mature enough” to cope with full-time work – never mind senior roles. “I know 40-year-olds who I don’t think are ready for full-time work,” he says, laughing. “Everyone is so different, I don’t think you can ever make a blanket statement.”

In the year he has been in post-Lewisham College, there have been many changes to contend with, not least the scrapping of the EMA and the introduction of a replacement bursary fund.

One of the biggest challenges has been letting the most vulnerable learners who are guaranteed a payment from the new bursary (children in care, those with disabilities, care leavers and teenage parents, amongst others), know that they are guaranteed funding.

Identifying who those students are can be



Picture by Nick Linford

difficult as local authorities can be reticent to share sensitive information about young people, says Travis.

Making decisions on how to allocate the discretionary fund has also been tough. As Travis points out: “There are other members of our cohort that are just as vulnerable as care leavers and looked-after children...so deciding how much you are going to offer them as a reasonable incentive to pay for the things that they need to do their course is really tricky.”

The college has put in an application for funds from the government’s ‘contingency budget’ (available this year only to help with the transition from the EMA to the bursary fund), but not knowing whether they will receive funding next term means many students are in limbo, unsure whether they will be able to go back in college after Christmas, something that can have an impact on their achievement. “If you are worried about everything else that’s going on outside your college life, it’s going to be hard to buckle down and focus,” says Travis.

Changes in the visa requirements for students wishing to study in the UK have also impacted on the workload of Travis and his team, including “complex negotiations with the Home Office, things like that,” to make sure learners don’t miss out on their chance to study at the college.

Housing is another key issue for students and

something Travis says he is “not expecting to get any better over the Christmas period.” The college works closely with local homelessness projects and charities; staff go into local hostels to talk to residents about college courses and can help them through the enrolment possible if necessary.

One issue that might rear its head in the New Year is the matter of how to support young parents. A consultation on the government’s Care To Learn programme, which provides support for childcare and related transport costs to help young parents further their education, has recently ended and the outcome could well be less money to go around for young parents who want to combine parenthood and study.

For the first time in his career Travis says he hasn’t got his eye on the next rung of the ladder – he is too busy with his current role. But he is ambitious and wouldn’t rule out a more senior role in education – perhaps as a principal – in the future.

What continues to motivate him is doing his best for the learners. “There is a real history at the college of being as inclusive as we can and tapping into peoples’ raw potential, getting them through the courses and getting them to progress.

“Unlocking someone’s potential and giving them opportunities is what makes it all worthwhile.”



FE Week Expert

Stop bashing schools



This conference season has felt particularly 'anti-school'. Don't get me wrong, there's always been an element of schools bashing, but this year it feels more desperate, and I think that's because it's not just from the usual suspects.

Working in education and across sectors (primary, secondary and further education) you see the 'bashings' come in cycles. First in the cycle comes GCSEs.

What regularly happens here, is a 'Falling Standards Shocker' story, where some interested party digs out an old O' Level paper and compares it unfavourably to a recent GCSE paper.

Then it's the turn of A-Levels. The record-breaking pass rates will be blamed on 'dumbing down' (it's obviously not going to be attributed to the effects of harder working students or better skilled teachers and lecturers).

Universities aren't immune; they'll be tackled over "Mickey Mouse" degrees and of churning out graduates who aren't 'work ready'.

So, on one hand, FE colleges share the loud complaints about the standards of literacy and numeracy and the 'dumbing down' of exams with schools, but on the other they are spared the howling cries for schools to stuff more and more into the curriculum.

Colleges and training providers say they can't get into the schools to talk to students, to tell them about the wonderful opportunities at their institution, to save them from their small school sixth forms.

Careers advice is also causing a rift. Connections, the careers advice service has all but disappeared, and once again schools are tasked with picking up that mantle, but without any additional funding to enable them to do so effectively.

FE colleges aren't keen; they are suspicious of schools' intentions and their ability to deliver advice and guidance, impartially.

Funding means that schools are clinging on tighter to their post 16 students and colleges are working harder than ever to loosen the schools' grip. It's a flawed numbers game and the stakes are higher than they've ever been.

Schools are bemoaning that, in an attempt to lure these students away from them, colleges are becoming quite predatory, putting on free transport and tempting students with free food, laptops and other goodies.

But, as I have explained to schools countless times, they have five years to work on their students, to encourage them into their sixth forms, whereas colleges have a much smaller window to engage with them - often despite school barriers.

I understand colleges' desperation; some have suffered significant drops in enrolments, the cuts surrounding education maintenance allowance (EMA) and falling demographics have been cited as probable causes. Some colleges' futures may be in the balance.

However, academies have also had an effect on college enrolments. The academies have now been established long enough for the interested to see improvements.

Because of their extra funding, and their renewed focus, they are winning influential friends and building enviable reputations; communication with parents has improved, uniforms have gotten smarter, discipline has been tackled, school days have been restructured, and results in the main, have improved. These academies are keeping their post-16 students in numbers before unseen.

But even they are not safe from the 'new kids on the block'. Free schools with sixth forms, supported by high profile academic sponsors, and UTCs (university technical colleges) sponsored by big business are causing secondaries and colleges to quiver.

Funding dictates that post-16 is a numbers game; institutions' survival and jobs depend on getting students through the door.

Of course students would do better if education weren't chopped up into sectors, and not require each sector to eat the next sector in order to survive, but we are where we are, and schools are an easy target.

Schools get it in the neck for all that is wrong with society, and like it or not, they're more visible than colleges, schools get the 'column inches' and those with agendas use that for their own ends.

Our education arena is already cluttered and confusing, and bashing the very schools that feed our colleges is not going to help. At this time of year, why not be the bigger sector, find some goodwill and play nice?

*Ruth Sparkes is Director of EMPRA
She tweets @EMPRA*

FE Week Expert

The latest plans for FE

With the Chancellor's Autumn Financial Statement now out of the way, budgets are being set for different parts of the education system.

First out of the blocks has been the FE and adult skills sector where BIS has announced an overall budget of £3.8bn for 2012/13, dropping as per previous announcements to £3.4bn for 2013/14 and £3.3bn for 2014/15.

Nor might it stop there for the Chancellor also confirmed in his Autumn Statement that spending limits will remain for at least a further two years beyond the current cycle, up in other words potentially to 2015/16.

We're therefore in for a long haul and as the Institute for Fiscal Studies put it, "one begins to run out of superlatives for describing quite how unprecedented (the situation) is."

Yet the sector may be able to draw some comfort from three other factors. First that some additional money will be available for at least the next two years from the European Social Fund and, from 2013, from the new FE loans system.

Second, that while the overall envelope may be getting smaller, some elements, notably currently apprenticeships and Learner Support, continue to receive some strong funding.

And third, as the Chancellor also indicated, the Government is launching a number of initiatives under its growth strategy such as the Youth Contract and the Regional Growth Fund in which the FE sector will play a key role and may attract additional resources.

But these days, funding comes as part of a wider package and the other part of the package is further system reform.

Much of what's in the reform document released alongside the Investment Statement is fairly familiar having been under consultation and discussion for much of the last few months but there are perhaps a few less familiar if not less expected aspects. They include the following.

First, in the area of opening up higher level vocational education, where in an effort to strengthen the ladder between F and HE, the Dept appears to be re-opening the CATs bag. "We therefore intend to invite collaborative proposals to increase credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) opportunities across further and higher education." This it seems will form part of what is being called a new 'Higher Vocational Education' portfolio which may in turn lead to re-adoption of the nomenclature of College of F and HE.

Second, and in a similar vein, the Dept is mirroring for the FE world the model being adopted in higher education to help prospective students get better advance intelligence about courses, by advocating the use of 'common information sets' and quality comparison information.



Third, adult literacy and numeracy, or English and maths as it's now to be known where following further research evidence, concerns remain that progress continues to be slow and where as a result the Dept appears keen to inject some new thinking and energy.

This means piloting a different funding model, one that reflects progress made, as well as considering the use of more flexible, unit-based stepping stones towards GCSE.

Fourth, the announcement that an independent Commission on Adult Education and Vocational Pedagogy will be established from next April.

This is something that Alison Wolf had proposed for 14-19 learning and will bring together a wide range of key stakeholders, professional bodies and practitioners to 'set out the standard expected of a good learning opportunity' and 'define a range of effective pedagogical approaches.'

The latter may be more easy to determine than the former and the question will remain as to how far you can bottle this sort of expertise up and release it when necessary but clearly the Government is keen to respond to reports such as the latest Annual Ofsted report which suggest that the quality of teaching in post-16 education can be patchy. The Commission and practitioner groups could play a big part in raising the game here.

Fifth, the intention to pilot community learning trusts next year with a view to possible roll-out the year after. Adult and community learning remains the poor relation of the adult learning world but this Government, like previous ones, recognises how important this local heartbeat of activity is.

The trust model sits within the Big Society concept and we shan't know exactly what form the trusts will take until the prospectus is released next year but it remains an interesting model.

*Steve Besley is Head of Policy at Pearson
He tweets @SteveBesley*



FE Week Expert

Employer ownership of skills: a Christmas rant



Employers are to be given £250 million of colleges' funding. Shocking. But hang on: what funding is it that colleges are entitled to?

Of course all good employers want to develop the skills of their workforce and apprentices, and most want to use the best colleges and training providers to help them. Where employers act as 'intelligent customers' they drive up the quality and impact of the training because, if nobody buys it, poor quality providers go bust. But at the moment, the state defines and regu-

lates the product, fixes the price and then routes the funding through those providers, good or bad. You would have to be a saint, as a provider, not to exploit the dominant position that gives you.

I should declare my interest. As Director of the LSC/SFA/NAS National Employer Service until recently, I and my team made sure that the senior HR directors of large employers could explain what they wanted from their skills and apprenticeship programmes, and were prepared to invest in enough inhouse expertise to own the funds and make sure the money worked hard for them.

Some large employers found this approach too onerous, and continued to find it easier to out-source the detailed thinking to their provider. But many others started to understand how to achieve their ambitions in spite of the complexity, and developed active long-term commercial partnerships with good, high quality, flexible providers.

I'm not suggesting all were perfect, but I was glad to see Ofsted's comment last month on the 'very strong performance' of 'employers who deliver their own training'.

Ok, so why do we still have a problem? Here are the first four of my reasons.

First, in spite of the evidence of quality, the furore about this proposal to 'give funds to employers' shows how deep-rooted is the belief that employer-led is second best, that employers are not to be trusted, and that the right thing to do is to leave this stuff to the professionals.

Second, we're not differentiating between what is good workplace training and programmes that the state is willing to buy. Of course we shouldn't pay the same good money for a qualification that takes an experienced person eight weeks, if what we actually want to encourage is a year-long development programme which includes mentoring, English and Maths and progression (though that doesn't mean that the experienced learner and their employer didn't benefit from a short programme).

Third, the market is dominated by providers (and no doubt some employers as well) who take short-cuts because their ambitions have shrunk to the accumulation of units of qualifications, as Alison Wolf noted, rather than the development of programmes of learning which have currency in the workplace.

Fourth, the support available to employers who would like to recruit young and unemployed people into work and into learning is chopped up into different funding rules and systems between DfE/schools, BIS/apprentice-

ships and DWP/JobcentrePlus, and unless you're motivated by the money, who has time for all that?

So a new challenge fund which employers can bid into but which still requires them to deliver the existing regulated SASE-compliant apprenticeship frameworks, and to do it in ways that are convenient to government, is doomed to disappoint. I fear its failure will be claimed as evidence that employers don't really care about skills. Instead, what this Employer Ownership project needs to achieve is something much more ambitious.

It needs to give employers the opportunity to develop and try out programmes of learning which address government priorities but are not fully regulated. It needs to find new ways of demonstrating accountability for public funds without admin systems so elaborate and complex that they absorb the funds needed for learning and drive employers mad.

And it needs to restore a commercial relationship between employers and their providers which is driven not by qualifications but by the needs of learners and employers.

Hilary Chadwick is a consultant and PhD student researching the skills and apprenticeship programmes of multi-nationals.

FE Week Agitator

Colleges in December... It's a Wonderful Life



Christmas - what does that mean for colleges? Well Christmas starts early in FE.

Feels like it starts in the middle of December and goes on well into the New Year.

Students drift off, lecturers wind down and the principal does the usual "Principal's round-up; thanking everyone for their hard work, telling everyone that they need to work harder; that 2012 will be grimmer than 2011, as s/he wishes everyone a "Merry Christmas" and makes a dash for main reception whilst they're grabbing

their passport, sun hat and tickets to a Canary island retreat...

Meanwhile, a large proportion of students are slogging their guts out at one of the busiest times of the year.

Work-based learners and apprentices working in hospitality, catering, hairdressing, leisure and of course retail.

These are not low numbers, these are learners in the hundreds of thousands.

Learners who will have no support from their college assessors who, like the principal are either sunning themselves, Christmas shopping or vegging out in front of Sky Movie reruns, quoting lines from "It's a Wonderful Life."

How many of you have the short phrase "employer led" in your prospectus? It's not true is it? Perhaps it should say, "Employer led, but only during the Academic Year."

The academic year was originally created for the pre-industrial era, when all 'able-bodied' young people were needed to help with harvesting over the summer.

"Even though colleges are facing a very difficult financial future, their hunger for growing their business is not apparent"

That's why it was designed around a long holiday in July and August, chopping up the rest of the year into three terms arranged around Christmas and Easter. Well, we are not in the pre-industrial era and colleges rely

heavily on employers to keep their businesses going, but only, it seems on their terms.

What I don't think colleges have got their heads around is the reality of competition. If colleges don't do what they say they're going to do, or offer the level of service that business demand, then others will step in.

We're already seeing it - The rise of the private training provider and in-house accredited training. Training that meets the needs of the employer, whenever and however it is required.

If colleges continue to play by the academic rule, then they're going to lose. They're not going to find anyone to play with them.

Some colleges do go the extra mile I will admit, but not at Christmas, and not at Easter and not for a couple of weeks in the summer... Even though colleges are facing a very difficult financial future, their hunger for growing their business is not apparent.

Are colleges stymied by unions or is it tradition, or is it plain laziness, or... is it Christmas time a cocktail of all three?

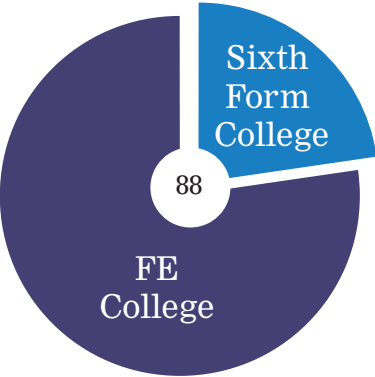
Merry Christmas
x



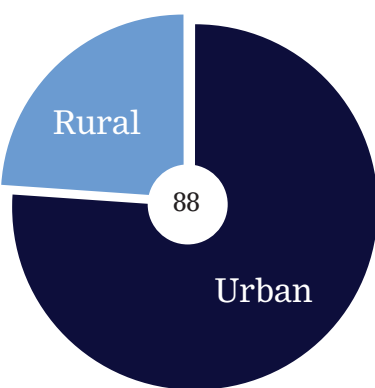
FE Week gets technical

FE Week brings you, on one handy **pull-out**, the third installment if Lsect’s 16-18 recruitment survey conducted 6th and 7th December following colleges’ first full data return (R04)

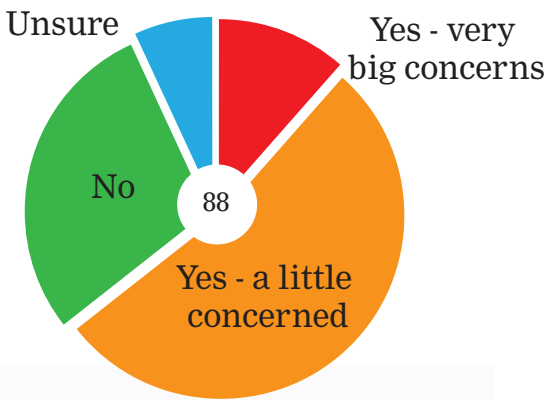
Which type of provider do you work for?



Would you describe your 16-18 full time provision mainly taking place in an urban or rural location?

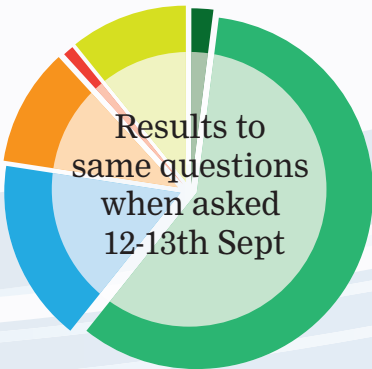
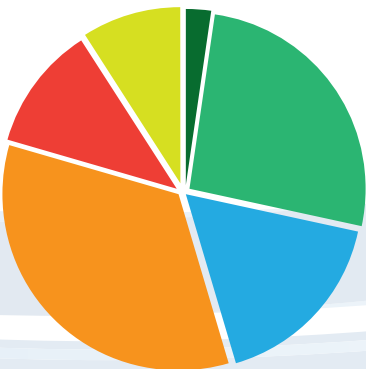


Do you have concerns that 16-18 year-old learners might not return after Christmas



Since last week 16-18 recruitment has

Improved a lot	2	2 %
Improved a little	23	26 %
Not improved (stayed about the same)	15	17 %
Got a little worse because of withdrawals	30	34 %
Got a lot worse because of withdrawals	10	11 %
Not applicable, as were on or above target	8	9 %



Full time 16-18 learners

Colleges	Total	Target	Actual	Performance	Performance	Result in Sept survey
FE Colleges	68	149,435	143,947	-5,488	-4 %	-3 %
Sixth form colleges	20	33,479	33,281	-198	-1 %	0 %
All	88	182,914	177,228	-5,686	-3 %	-3 %

Performance percentage against target, based on survey responses

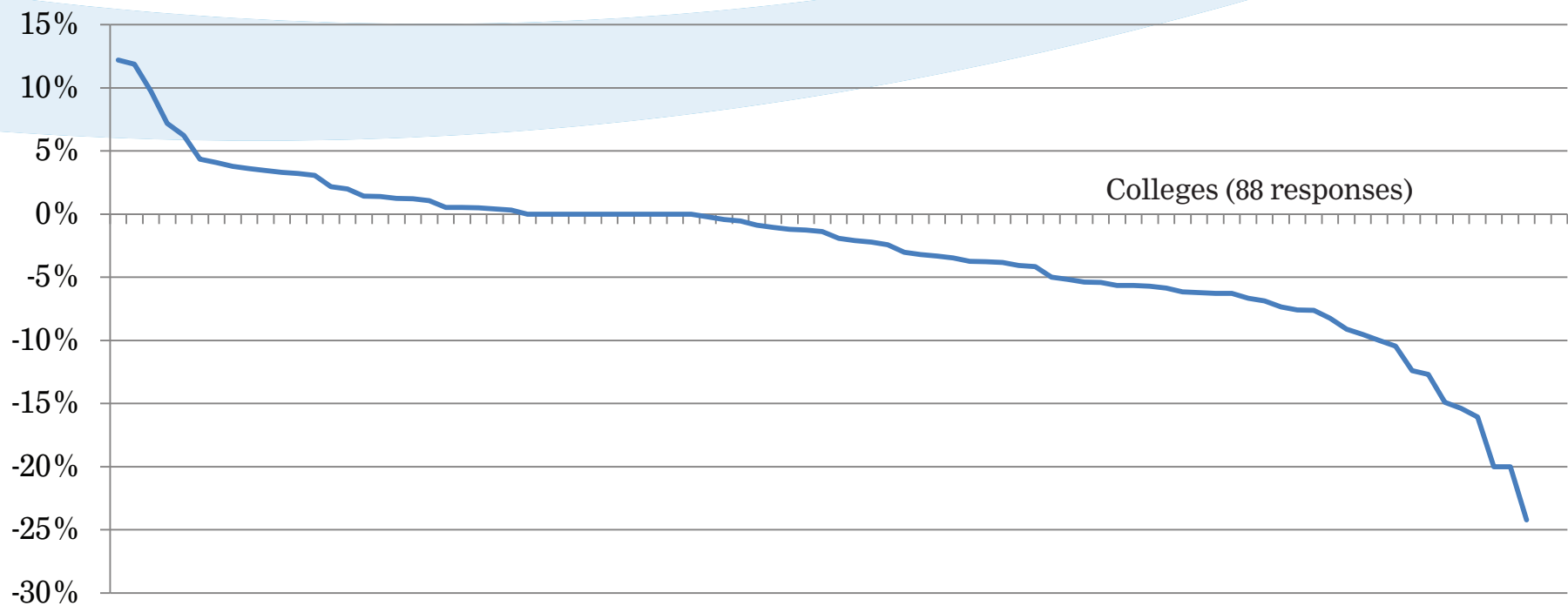
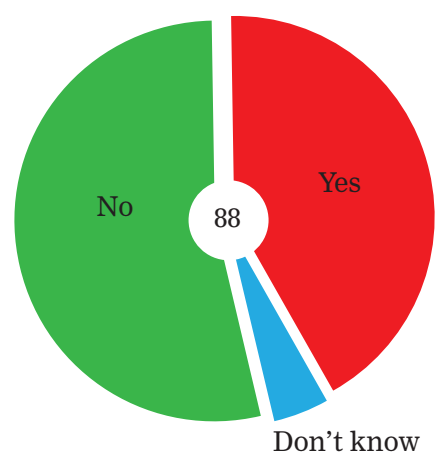




Table of respondents predicting more than a 6% shortfall

College type	Location	Shortfall	Shortfall	Impact of scrapping EMA?	Anything else worth mentioning?
FE College	Rural	-196	-24 %	Some	Down on soft vocational subjects
FE College	Urban	-300	-20 %	Short term impact because of the headlines. I expect recruitment for 2012/13 to pick up	
FE College	Urban	-300	-20 %	Difficult to say at this stage	
FE College	Urban	-250	-16 %	Big impact. College in an area of high disadvantage.	More applicants wanted an Apprenticeship and were not interested in full time study at college
FE College	Rural	-400	-15 %		There are still some additional courses that start after R04 that are not yet in our ILR and would not have been sent in R04 in any case, so our current FT number is lower than expected - skewing the figures stated
FE College	Urban	-250	-15 %	Drastic - numbers came in and withdrew in droves (new building bounce - bounced right off)	
FE College	Urban	-520	-13 %	has affected cross London 'out of borough' recruitment. Students contacted said they've elected to study closer to home to reduce costs.	vocational level 1 (Business, IT, Travel) did not recruit well. May be that this cohort has greater dependency on EMA & financial support.
FE College	Urban	-300	-12 %	Reduction in level 1 learners	
FE College	Urban	-200	-10 %		
Sixth Form College	Urban	-190	-10 %	Significant. The Bursary is helping the most disadvantaged but its no replacement.	
FE College	Urban	-200	-10 %	Indications show Level 1 from disadvantage areas fell by 200. The most likely recruits to take advantage of the EMA	The Borough have identified a large number of NEETS. and we have 150 unfilled places for them, but they just won't come
FE College	Urban	-200	-9 %	Still working on this as it is complex	
FE College	Urban	-177	-8 %	We have less EMA/Bursary learners than last year. Some students who withdrew indicated they could not afford the travel, which may be related to withdrawal of EMA.	Recruitment of full time learners in IT at Level 2 and L3 Extended Diploma fell significantly. Level 1 recruitment was down across college. Sport and Fitness did not recruit well. A Level Art recruitment was poor.
FE College	Rural	-80	-8 %		We had a major refurb over the summer that lasted to October - maybe off putting for potential learners?
FE College	Rural	-285	-8 %	Very little - more on recruitment than retention but difficult to measure. We no longer receive NEET figures from Connexions	Havn't had sufficient childcare funding. Local transport policy has had an adverse effect. Council now only fund to nearest college, regardless of course choice.
FE College	Urban	-200	-7 %		
FE College	Urban	-269	-7 %	Difficult to say. The bursary offer has been significantly under-subscribed, which we didn't expect, so it is hard to quantify the impact of EMA removal	We are down a little across the board - no one subject area is significantly under.
FE College	Urban	-200	-7 %	Severe	

Did you submit the ILR R04 data return without any difficulty?



A selection of comments regarding the submission of the ILR R04 data return

"Significant difficulty particularly in removing one funding error for duplicate records arising from employment status against ER programme aims."

"The submission was fine, but working out what on earth some of the combinations in particular fields should be was a nightmare."

"Problems with OLDC, Problems with LIS reports and lateness of everything caused a tremendous amount of pressure and anxiety."

"We write our own MIS software so achieved this through 3 months of exhaustive testing."

"The data went off ok the difficulty was with the LIS not working and not having tools like DSATs available"

"Files went through. Complete lack of confidence in any of the data at this point, including the LIS reports."

"Issues with provider factors and obvious lateness of LIS updates etc created a few hairy moments as well as waiting for over eight hours for a file to be processed through the OLDC."

"Couldn't correct the errors fast enough ... delay in understanding the errors - a nightmare!"



FE Week campus round-up



Havering College students inspired by games

Students are celebrating after their college was awarded a prestigious accolade by the London 2012 Inspire, presented by Olympic silver medalist Steve Cram.

Havering College of Further and Higher Education has been granted the Inspire Mark for its project to stage a unique performance at the London Palladium, having met the values of the Olympics and Paralympics.

The show, titled Inspiration, promises to be a breathtaking spectacular with college students and pupils from east London schools performing in the West End alongside the characters from Sesame Street's live touring show, Elmo Makes Music. It is the brainchild of lecturer in music Peter Dayson whose previous musical productions have won

international awards.

Mr Dayson said: "To gain Inspire Mark recognition for our project is a very exciting achievement for the college.

"We are extremely proud to be part of the Cultural Olympiad and believe the production will inspire our young people and leave a legacy of ambition beyond 2012."

Seb Coe, chair of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, said: "Inspiration is encouraging young people to fulfil their potential.

"I am proud that with the help of partners such as Havering College, we are delivering our vision to use the power of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games to boost participation in the cultural arts."

Holidays are comin' for Warrington Collegiate students' musical production



Performing arts students at Warrington Collegiate sang 'Halleluyah' when the Christmas Coca-Cola lorry visited their local supermarket.

More than a dozen learners performed an excerpt from the college's upcoming production, 'Seussical - The Musical', in hailstorm conditions as the iconic truck arrived at Tesco.

Sindy Richardson, Curriculum Manager for Performing Arts at Warrington Collegiate, said: "It was a great opportunity to showcase the student's talents.

"Despite the wintry weather our students rose to the occasion and gave the Coca-Cola

truck a warm welcome."

Warrington Collegiate will be performing 'Seussical - The Musical', the hit Broadway show, between the 9th and 22nd of January.

"As far as I can tell a two week run of a musical is a UK first for an FE college," said James Baker, Course Leader at Warrington Collegiate.

Mr Baker added: "The fact that we're running Seussical for an impressive sixteen shows allows students to gain essential skills for this tough industry.

"They aspire to be top class professional actors and this is truly a reality experience."

Myerscough College rugby players scrum down for England Colleges' Rugby Squad



A college is celebrating the fact that a group of its rugby players were selected to join a national training camp.

Nine of Myerscough College's Rugby Academy gained one of the fourteen places available in the Northern Region, to join the England Colleges' Rugby Men's Squad.

The England Colleges Men's squad is made up of players who have successfully taken part in the regional trials process.

They represent the best further education colleges rugby has to offer and will represent their college and their country in internationals

against the Portuguese U18's, Irish Exiles and the Welsh Colleges.

Myerscough's Academy course leader Rod Murray said: "Everyone here is so happy for the boys.

"We're especially proud that nine out of the fourteen Northern Region places have gone to our Academy students.

"It shows the level of talent we have here at Myerscough College and proves that our training methods and techniques are working.

"Hopefully next year we can get a clean sweep with all fourteen places."



Weston College uses app to teach music

An online portal for the teaching of guitar, bass and drums has been developed at Weston College.

As well as coming in to college for one-to-one lessons, students on Music Practice courses can experience tuition online and via an iPad app called iTutorus, developed by college music technician Richard King.

Music courses curriculum manager Paul Raymond said the online lessons and accompanying app were created in response to the demands of a growing number of students.

He said: "We know that many people, especially younger musicians, learn techniques from websites like YouTube.

"While these can be good they're not always accurate and so we recognised the need to create something that was just as accessible but of exceptionally high quality."

Students using the iPad app can watch the tutorial and upload their own efforts for marking.

Grimsby Institute secret Santa appeal



A college has set up a secret Santa appeal to aid homeless people enrolled on its courses and in the local area.

This Christmas, learners and staff at Grimsby Institute can donate Christmas gifts and food for Christmas Hampers for homeless learners in Grimsby.

Stuart Owen, Communications Officer for the Grimsby Institute Group said: "Many of these homeless young people are from the Grimsby YMCA, the Foyer, the Community House and Door Step and they won't be celebrating Christmas with family or loved ones.

He added: "We have also identified a need at the Grimsby Women's Refuge where there are currently 14 women and 27 children, who have no home, no personal possessions and no family."

The Institute has asked local businesses to help contribute to this Christmas Appeal by donating stock, or gift vouchers to help increase its impact.



Skilled students from City of Bath College help African villagers build vital shelters



Students from City of Bath College took part in a life-changing experience as they spent a week on a charity project in Africa.

The team of 15 students, plus staff, completed the community project in Gambia, where they built to a new grain store alongside villagers in Medina Salaam.

They spent a week adding the grain store to the village's market building to provide a dry place to store rice and other perishable goods.

They also helped to improve the accommodation at Woulaba Garden - a locally owned and managed tourist lodge.

Trainee stonemason Luke Kingston said:

"This was my first time abroad and it was a real eye-opener.

"Seeing life in a developing country really brought home how much we take for granted in this country."

Carpentry student Chris Horler added: "It was an amazing experience, the kind of thing I never thought I'd do. To work somewhere so different to home was a great opportunity and I loved every minute of it."

Project leader Lynne Scragg said: "The local village made the group very welcome and were really appreciative of the students' commitment and effort."



Gavin and Stacey star opens new centre at Lakes College



TV star Mathew Horne was on hand to open a college's new £1.2 million centre.

The Gavin and Stacey actor offered words of wisdom to the students of Lakes College when he joined for the opening of a new 14 - 19 special education centre.

The centre focuses on enhancing the development of the provision and students with learning difficulties or disabilities.

It will be the main base for the college's vocational arts offer which includes the college's new performing arts programmes.

Mathew said: "I sincerely hope the work that is going to be here can give people the experience and creative satisfaction I had at a very young age and inspiration to believe it can be done - or, if not that, at very least a sense of friendship and fun."

Principal Cath Richardson said: "We were delighted to welcome Mathew to join us in our celebrations for the launch of the new centre. His advice has proved to be very inspiring to the students."

Carshalton College wins FE First Award

Carshalton College is celebrating after scooping a top award.

The college has won the Website Category at the College Marketing Network's 2011 FE First Awards following the launch of its new website earlier this year.

They were congratulated on their strategy to engage key markets, relevant and up to date content and achieving the outcome under budget.

Rob Simpson, web and creative manager at the college, said: "It was an exciting project to be involved with.

"The preparation included a week filming at the college to provide a real insight in to college life with students and business partners talking about their experience and a virtual tour is now available.

"We wanted to provide an interactive and fresh website to capture visitor's interest and make information accessible to get all their answers about the college in one place."



York College to play part in theatre company

York College has announced a partnership with a theatrical production company.

Over the coming months, students will be involved in supporting York Mystery Plays, using a variety of skills learned on college courses.

Liz Moon, head of marketing at the college, said: "York College can offer much needed support towards the 2012 production.

"To kick-start the process tutors and students will lead workshops during York Residents' Festival weekend, highlighting a range of skills needed to bring the Mystery Plays to life.

"For example at the Yorkshire Museum residents can 'Have a go' at media make-up techniques, prop making and biblical crafts.

"Also, watch out for the College's Performing Arts students who will be in the city centre engaging residents in a medieval dance flashmob experience. "

Liam Evans-Ford, community producer of the York Mystery Plays, added: "I am delighted York College has become a leading educational partner.

"The students' many talents will benefit the production enormously."



Lewisham College stages an awe-ful Christmas panto

Students put on a dazzling display for their Christmas panto - oh yes they did!

Lewisham College last week played host to six shows of their stage showpiece, The Awe-Ful Tale

of Cinderella.

The performance was made all the more impressive with the fact they have only been at the institute since September.

Drama tutor Karla Ptacek said: "The most important thing to remember is that the majority of our actors are first year students and they've barely been here 12 weeks.

"They've got to sing, act, dance and have the right comic timing amongst 70 other students.

"To pull that off is an incredible accomplishment and the audience are really loving it.

"It's a win-win. We perform these for the community and our local schools, especially in Deptford, come every year and these students get to partake in a Christmas celebration.

"It builds links and we're really proud of it."

West Suffolk College release charity single

Kind hearted musicians have created a Christmas charity single.

Music Performance students at West Suffolk College have produced the single to raise money for children's charity Camille's Appeal.

Fifteen students on the second year of an Extended Music Diploma have been involved in writing and producing the single, called This Winter.

It is a classic Christmas single with a feel-good lyric and catchy chorus line, which builds from a simple acoustic beginning to an impressive multi-layered ending.

All of the members of the band wrote their own parts. Chorus and backing vocals were performed by the rest of the Extended Music Diploma Year 2.

The students were given an assignment to create and market a charity Christmas single.



The group decided to support Camille's Appeal, an Ipswich-based charity for children with brain tumours.

Working under the production name Decibell Pro, every class member was involved in the final product. The single was recorded in the College's own recording studio.

'This Winter' will be distributed online via Facebook, Tumblr and YouTube. It can be downloaded for free and donations made via www.justgiving.com/Decibell-Pro.

*FE Week events...*

Government policy on careers advice and guidance in spotlight at conference

Nick Summers

@summersnicholas

The future of careers advice in both colleges and schools was scrutinised at the AoC Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Conference last week.

The event, held at 'Etc. Venues' in London, was a chance for professionals in the further education sector to express their concerns to politicians, civil servants and union representatives.

Joy Mercer, Director of Policy (Education) at AoC, started the morning by introducing the speakers and commenting on the rapidly changing landscape both in education and employment.

"We are in a very interesting situation in terms of careers guidance," she said.

"We've got one million young people unemployed, and we've got a lot more choice at 14 and at 16 - so it's quite complicated out there.

The senior policy manager added: "People don't go into a job which they continue until they retire anymore.

"And for young people, with an economy which is 'interesting', and in fact very challenging at the moment, it's ever more important that at the time in their life when they're thinking about committing themselves to a choice of a course or a qualification, that they get the right, personal, expert, face to face guidance from an independent adviser."

Joy Mercer then handed over to Simon Hughes MP, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats and government advocate on access to education.

Mr Hughes delivered a number of well-crafted anecdotes about both his constituents and a number of young people he had recently visited, including Ashley J Baptiste, a recent entrant to the X Factor competition, and Grace Jones, who recently celebrated her 112th birthday.

The Minister explained that his experiences with these people had helped to emphasise his thoughts on the importance of basic education and quality careers advice.

"Even in the age of emails, and Twitter, and online, and everybody texting all the time, actually the thing that really makes the difference is being able to talk to someone who is not your parent, and not your teacher; they're great, but to talk to other people about careers," Mr Hughes said.

"That's why I've been pushing so hard for the government to move to make a commitment to face to face careers guidance."

Mr Hughes emphasised that when he had surveyed young people about their preferred way of receiving careers advice at school, 100 per cent say they preferred it to be in person.

"I'm clear that we need to really value the face to face careers advice," Mr Hughes said.

In a speech titled 'Careers guidance for young

people and adults - now more vital than ever', Mr Hughes outlined four key points, including his vision of an annual prompt service regarding careers advice.

"I'm really keen that we move to a system where by the time everyone leaves school, they're basically linked into a perpetual careers advice prompt service," Mr Hughes said.

"So that literally every year, you will be reminded about what the options are."

Mr Hughes continued: "So if you leave school and you're working in your dad's garage, you are reminded that you can still get an apprenticeship, still go to college, get a technical qualification, get a BTEC, or think about University."

As previously reported in *FE Week*, Mr Hughes concluded by suggesting that both learners and parents needed a better understanding of the costs involved with each qualification.

"We absolutely need to get the message across as to what the cost benefits are of all of the options," Mr Hughes said.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats then handed over to Brian Lightman, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL).

"I think it's tremendously important to have high quality, impartial careers advice and guidance," Mr Lightman said.

"The social mobility agenda is not just about going to university, it is about people being able to get a step on the ladder; and we know there are very different steps on that ladder; and at very different stages."

Mr Lightman, on request by the event organisers, focused on the impact the changing services for information, advice and guidance was having on schools.

"The whole government policy agenda of structural changes, the choice agenda, the introduction of free schools, UTCs, new types of academies and so on, all of the curriculum change, much of which is at the moment only highlighted in very broad terms - all the detail is still to follow, which means very confusing and conflicting messages for young people," Mr Lightman said.

"All of these things make the need for advice and guidance desperately important."

The ASCL General Secretary then commented on the riots which took place in August, and how careers advice could help to address some of the deep rooted problems young people had.

"It's about raising aspirations, it's about injecting hope, and when we saw all those terrible pictures of what was going on in August, I just felt what we could do to inject hope in young people," Mr Lightman said.

"Aspirations yes, but actually to make them believe in themselves, and believe in the opportunities that are there for them and to know how to actually access those things."

Although it looks likely that school teachers will take on at least some of the responsibility



for delivery of careers guidance, Mr Lightman was keen to emphasise that learners needed objective, factual information given by appropriate professionals.

"You have to have qualified people who are up to date, who have the right information, the objective information, and know where to access that information online, and on the telephone services and all the other things that are going to back that up," Mr Lightman said.

The rise in apprenticeships has been debated back and forth over the last few months, but it was rare to have an opportunity to discuss how they are communicated to learners at school.

Mr Lightman said: "I'm very aware that despite all of the efforts about apprenticeships, there is still too much confusion about it.

"We're still not getting the message across about all of the opportunities that are out there.

"To make sure young people know what apprenticeships are, that they don't all start at 16, that you can start them at various stages and you can do them in all kinds of different places as well."

The keynote speeches were rounded off by Dr Susan Pember OBE, Director of Further Education, Skills Investment and Performance at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Dr Pember used the conference to expand upon, among others, the new National Careers Service due to be launched next year.

"It's about the growth agenda. We cannot grow the country if young people keep on making the wrong choices," she said.

Dr Pember explained that the government initiatives announced both in the Autumn Statement, delivered by George Osborne, and 'New Challenges New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan', published by BIS, were about "growing individuals" in order to boost the economy.

"If you get an empowered learner, and a good careers service, which is ensuring that the learner is empowered by good information and good advice, many of the other things that we need will follow," she said.

Dr Pember went on to justify both the capacity and approach of the National Careers Service, arguing that professional guidance would be "stepping back into the light" as part of the "start of a renaissance".

All of the speakers convened before the first refreshment break to answer questions about the centralisation of the government's new careers service, and whether advice from schools and colleges would ever truly be impartial.

In the afternoon delegates could register to attend a number of breakout sessions presented by, among others, Louise Proctor, Head of Service Development in the National Careers Service Team, part of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), and Paul Chubb, Director and Professional Adviser at Careers England.



Brian Lightman, Joy Mercer, Susan Pember and Simon Hughes answer a number of questions from college professionals



Simon Hughes, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats reading out an email to the audience whilst delegates tweet in *Pictures by Nick Linford*



Brian Lightman speaks to the room at the AoC Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Conference at *etc. venues* in Victoria, London

What's on

A selection of events & conferences for 2012

10 January
Ultimate Curriculum Planning Workshop
~ North West www.lsect.com

13 January
Ultimate Curriculum Planning Workshop
~ London www.lsect.com

18 - 19 January
EMFEC Centenary Conference ~ Daventry
www.emfec.co.uk

25 January
Ultimate Curriculum Planning Workshop
~ North West www.lsect.com

30 January
Subcontracting Funding Summit ~ London
www.lsect.com

31 January
Teaching & Learning Conference ~ London
www.aoc.co.uk

2 February
This Year's In Tray ~ Leeds
www.aelp.org.uk

8 February
Literacy & Numeracy Conference ~ London
www.aoc.co.uk

22 February
Shared Services Conference ~ Birmingham
www.aoc.co.uk

13 March
Spring College Data Conference
www.lsect.co.uk

13 March
HR Conference ~ Birmingham
www.aoc.co.uk

14 March
Communications Conference ~ London
www.aoc.co.uk

15 March
Information, Advice & Guidance ~ London
www.neilstewartassociates.com

29 March
HE in FE Conference ~ London
www.aoc.co.uk

19 - 20 June
AELP National Conference 2012 ~ London
www.aelp.org.uk

20 - 21 June
College FDs' Conference ~ Telford
www.aoc.co.uk

13 - 14 July
FE Weekend ~ London
www.surveymonkey.com/s/feweekend



Leadership Services **Associates**

The Skills Network is looking for high quality associates and qualified sector specialists to join our new Q.L.A Team.

We are seeking outstanding individuals with a proven track record in the FE sector with high levels of expertise in one of the following:

- Curriculum
- Quality
- Finance
- Management Information Systems
- Teaching and learning
- Inspection
- Funding
- Human Resources

Associates must be able to provide expert strategic guidance and operational support along with quality improvement solutions and delivery for our partner colleges.

To apply please send your CV for the attention of Jev Bhalla at The Skills Network, Abbey Court, 16 Benedict Drive, Selby, YO8 8RY or email Jev.Bhalla@theskillsnetwork.co.uk Alternatively call us on 01757 210522.

QLA is a division of The Skills Network

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Lsect

Learning & skills ~ events, consultancy and training



Office Manager

25 - 35k (DOE)

Reporting directly to the Managing Director of a small but rapidly growing business (10 staff), this person would be responsible for day-to-day office management, including staff and financial administration.

Please send a copy of your CV to jobs@lsect.com by **December 16th 2011**

Advertising Sales Executive

22-25k plus commission (DOE)

You will be responsible for all recruitment ads, setting yield and revenue targets and creating new advertising opportunities for clients. You will be selling direct to clients but will also be sourcing business opportunities through advertising and recruitment agencies.

Please send a copy of your CV to gemma.ryder@feweek.co.uk by **December 16th 2011**

Go to www.feweek.co.uk/index.php/jobs/ for more

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For recruitment advertising solutions please contact us on jobs@feweek.co.uk or contact the advertising team on 0208 123 4891





The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London

is a dynamic College, serving its local community and beyond. With over 20,000 students and two main centres, the College is central to work and study in Enfield and Haringey.

The College of
Haringey, Enfield
and North East London



Director of Human Resources

Full-time, Permanent - Ref: 11/24

Salary range £66,528 - £72,426 pa

30 days annual leave

Closing date: Monday 19 December 2011

Interviews: Wednesday 11 January 2012

We have a £45m turnover and we employ 650 staff. The role is part of the Senior Management Group and requires an individual with a proven track record in operational and strategic HR management. You will have the ability to work on your own initiative, work under pressure and meet challenging deadlines and targets. You will be responsible for delivering an innovative and responsive Human Resource strategy for the College, and you will have sound evidence of leadership success with the ability to motivate others. Experience within the education sector is desirable, but not essential.

For further information visit www.conel.ac.uk/staff/vacancies

Email recruitment@staff.conel.ac.uk Tel 020 8442 3045 (answerphone)

Our students are award-winning, our provision and facilities are highly rated, our finances are strong and we have the passion to transform lives. We offer the best possible experience to our learners, employers and staff alike. Join us!

Focus on Success

New openings at the College of Accountancy and Management Studies



Lecturer/Senior Lecturer Business and Management

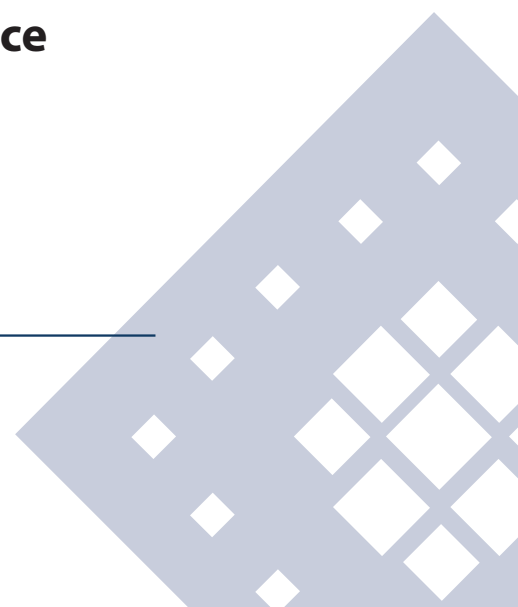
Lecturer/Senior Lecturer Finance and Accounting

CAMS requires **Lecturers/Senior Lecturers** to teach on a variety of courses including HND, LCM, CTH and ACCA

Salary £27,000 to £36,00 (DOE)

Marketing Communications & Sales Executive

Salary £21,000 to £25,000 +Sales Commission



Re-shaping Nottingham through excellence, employability and enterprise.

Director of Finance

c. £61k to £67k per annum

Director of ICT

c. £61k to £67k per annum

Director of Property and Facilities

c. £61k to £67k per annum

We are in a period of exciting and progressive change and are looking to recruit to our Senior Management team people with the vision, talent and passion to deliver a re-newed College Nottingham. We believe that ncn has the capacity to make a major contribution to transforming the future prospects of our City, County and Region and we seek to position ourselves at the heart of partnership strategies to deliver economic growth, business formation and employment outcomes.

We are ambitious. We believe we can and must do more to impact positively on the lives and prosperity of local people. We will look to raise their aspirations and instil them with a new spirit of enterprise. We will also seek to enhance our support to local businesses and key employment and wealth creating sectors, providing the future skills they need to become more competitive.

Our **Director of Finance** will take the strategic lead on all funding and financial issues including the development of an ambitious and innovative Income Diversity plan. This is a key role in maintaining the financial stability of our college whilst supporting new initiatives for employability and enterprise. This role will also lead on risk management and managing excellent partnerships with our auditors.

Our **Director of Property and Facilities** will lead on the development and implementation of our Estates Strategy and ensuring all our facilities are excellent environments conducive to high quality learning and customer experience. This role will direct our estate, facilities and project management of developments to our estate through innovative leadership and positive partnerships, reflecting a commitment to excellence, employability and enterprise. This role will also ensure we maximise efficiency of our estate through collaboration with curriculum and partnerships.

Our **Director of ICT** will lead on the strategic review and modernisation of our ICT function and services to deliver excellence, employability and enterprise. The role requires strong leadership and change management skills to deliver on high quality, customer responsive ICT services, ensure alignment of ICT resources to our priorities and an appropriate ICT infrastructure to deliver an ambitious agenda.

For all our senior positions, the ability to lead, inspire, motivate and develop staff will be crucial to our ambitions. As will be the commitment and ability to collaborate effectively with internal and external partners.

Please call Amarjit Basi, Principal and Chief Executive on 0115 9121994 for an informal discussion in the first instance.

The selection assessment dates for the posts are in week commencing **23 January 2012**.

The closing date for these posts is midday on Tuesday 3 January 2012.



For more job listings go to:
www.feweek.co.uk



Deputy Principal

£45,000 - £55,000

Barnsley College is an exciting place to be. In recent times we have enjoyed significant success and our reputation for outstanding provision and innovation is growing all the time.

We are looking to appoint a Deputy Principal who is progressive, visionary and passionate about the quality of the A-level provision of our Sixth Form College. This post is critical to the success of the Sixth Form College and will be responsible for driving change and increasing success, enabling our students to achieve their maximum potential.

Working closely with the Principal of the Sixth Form College, the Deputy Principal will lead, inspire, motivate and take responsibility for success and achievement, transforming the standard of provision and implementing strategies that will ensure our value added will significantly exceed target.

Your experience will be at management level and you will be comfortable developing, implementing and leading on key strategies on all aspects of the A-level provision and performance. You will have a degree and will be able to demonstrate a proven track record of outstanding achievement with enthusiasm to develop a management team and secure success.

You will also have the vision, energy and communication skills to support and develop collaborative working with other senior managers and external bodies.

Closing date: **Monday 19th December 2011 at 12.00pm**
Interviews held on: **Tuesday 17th January 2012 & Wednesday 18th January 2012**

Go to www.barnsley.ac.uk to complete an application form online

Apply online at www.ncn.ac.uk or call 0115 911 3662 for an information pack.



Your College jokes, rhymes & riddles



Have you heard Nick Linford SPEAK?
Have you counted the times he can say FE WEEK?
Are you inspired by his views on NEETS?
Are you amazed at the speed he can get out his TWEETS?
He knows how to shake up the powers that BE!
Some say he's the oracle in the world of FE!
MP's love him or hate him, a bit like MARMITE!
But the reason for this is he's quite often RIGHT!

-Grant Basson, COO, Hill McManus Limited

A keen applicant for the job of Finance Director at an FE college is being interviewed for the post. At the end of the interview the college Chair of the Corporation throws in one last question, "What is 7 x 3?" The applicant quickly replies, "23."

When he comes out of the interview he takes out his calculator and checks his answer. He is therefore very surprised to be offered the job. On his first day in the post he bumps into the Chair and has to ask him why he was offered the job given his answer to the last question. "Oh you were the nearest," he replied!

-Grant Basson, COO, Hill McManus Limited

Louise Kelsy wins £100 worth of vouchers of her choice for winning best joke, rhyme or riddle! Well done Louise!



An MIS Manager's Prayer

Before I lay me down to sleep, I pray for some systems so strong and sleek.
An ILR that's robust and strong,
A LIS that won't tell me my funding's all wrong.
A Skills Funding Agency that won't give me gip,
That will put an end to three week apprenticeships.
A system to use that won't have to be forced.
That Government will see that we're under-resourced.
An online portal that I can just log in.

One source of info so my brain is not fogging.
Give me back the LAD and get rid of LARA,
Why replace it with something that's so much poorer?
Pay for a conference so I can go get a good look
At new legislation instead of reading it from a book
I pray that these systems will not let me down
And leave me with my ever perpetual frown
And as I lay me down to bed
I look at the mess-up you sent me instead! Amen

- Louise Kelsey, MIS Manager, City of York Council

As my son dawdled off to college I shouted: "Hurry up or you'll be late"

He shouted back: "Its ok they're open until 3:30."

-Andy Sheppard, Head of Partnerships & Contract Management at Pearson

What's big, grey and nearly ruined the FE Sector. . .The demand-led elephant.

-Rob Wye, Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

FE Week Sudoku challenge

	6			9				8
7		8			2	9		4
	5	2	4		1	3		
	9			6		1		5
			1		3			
8		7		2				4
		4	7		9	2	5	
1		9	5			7		6
3				1				8

Difficulty:
EASY

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

Solutions: Next week

4				5	7			
		8			9		1	6
	1			6				
		2					5	7
	3			1			8	
8	5					6		
			6				9	
1	2		5			7		
			8	9				5

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Last Week's solutions

2	9	5	7	6	1	3	8	4
4	3	1	8	5	9	7	6	2
8	6	7	4	3	2	1	9	5
6	8	3	1	4	5	9	2	7
5	4	2	3	9	7	6	1	8
7	1	9	6	2	8	5	4	3
3	7	8	9	1	4	2	5	6
9	2	6	5	8	3	4	7	1
1	5	4	2	7	6	8	3	9

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

7	8	2	3	4	5	1	6	9
1	4	6	9	8	7	2	3	5
5	9	3	2	1	6	8	4	7
8	3	4	7	5	9	6	2	1
9	5	1	4	6	2	3	7	8
2	6	7	1	3	8	9	5	4
3	1	9	6	7	4	5	8	2
4	2	5	8	9	3	7	1	6
6	7	8	5	2	1	4	9	3

Difficulty:
EXPERT

FE Week mini-mascot

Follow the adventures of *FE Week's* biggest and smallest fan!



"Mostly this week I have been trying to get this scratchy hat off"

You can also follow our *FE Week* mini-mascot on Twitter @daniellinford